

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5314

S E C R E T BEIRUT 4766

NODIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PBOR MOPS MILI LE IS US

SUBJ: SOUTH LEBANON: POST MORTEM

1. WHILE IT PERHAPS TOO EARLY TO DRAW CONCLUSIONS FROM HECTIC EVENTS OF LAST TEN DAYS, I HAVE A FEW IMPRESSIONS I WOULD LIKE TO PUT DOWN ON PAPER BEFORE THEY FADE.

2. FIRST OF ALL, AS SEEN FROM HERE, ISRAELI MOVE INTO LEBANON, HOWEVER WELL IT MAY HAVE BEEN PREPARED MILITARILY, WAS WOEFULLY INEPT. ISRAELIS SEEM NOT TO HAVE CONSIDERED CONSEQUENCES OF WHAT THEY WERE DOING, OR WHAT THEY WOULD ACCOMPLISH. TO UNDERTAKE A RISKY OPERATION LIKE THIS JUST TO BOLSTER THE MORALE OF MAJOR HADDAD AND HIS MEN, IF THAT WAS THEIR PURPOSE, WAS FOOLISH TO SAY THE LEAST. IF THEIR PURPOSE WAS TO DERAIL THE SHTAURA ACCORD, THEY SEEM TO HAVE ACCOMPLISHED JUST THE REVERSE. THEY FURTHERMORE GAVE THE PALESTINIANS AN EXCUSE FOR RESUMING ROCKET ATTACKS ON ISRAELI TOWNS, SOMETHING WE WOULD EXPECT BEGIN'S DOMESTIC CRITICS TO SEIZE UPON.

3. I DO NOT KNOW WHAT TEL AVIV'S PERCEPTION OF WEIZMAN IS, BUT HE COMES ACROSS IN THE TELEGRAMS AS SOMETHING OF A MISGUIDED MISSILE. WHEN, FOR INSTANCE, HE TALKS ABOUT "GOING IN" TO RETALIATE AGAINST PALESTINIAN ROCKET ATTACKS

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JUST AS THE CEASE-FIRE IS SUPPOSED TO TAKE PLACE, WHOM DOES HE THINK HE IS GOING TO ATTACK AND WHERE? DOES HE REALLY BELIEVE THAT BLIND RETALIATION WILL SILENCE THE ROCKETS? IF SO, HE MUST HAVE NO UNDERSTANDING OF THE ANARCHICAL SITUATION IN SOUTH LEBANON AND THE MOBILITY OF THE WEAPONS INVOLVED.

4. BY CONTRAST, I HAVE BEEN SURPRISED AND IMPRESSED BY THE

CALM, PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE OF SARKIS AND BOUTROS. ALTHOUGH BOUTROS INSISTED THERE COULD BE NO CEASE-FIRE SEPARATED FROM SHATAURA AGREEMENT, SARKIS DECIDED ON HIS OWN (ACCORDING TO BOUTROS) TO GO AHEAD AND WORK FOR A CEASE-FIRE AFTER WE PUT WEIZMAN'S PROPOSITION TO HIM ON THE NIGHT OF THE 23RD. I SUSPECT HE DID NOT HAVE TO WORK VERY HARD, BECAUSE THE PLO WAS ALREADY DISPOSED TO GO ALONG WITH THE IDEA, FOR ITS OWN REASONS, ACCORDING TO OUR SOURCES. NEVERTHELESS, LEBANESE WORKED SURPRISINGLY EFFICIENTLY IN ESTABLISHING CONTACT WITH PLO (PRIMIN HOSS SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN PRIME MOVER IN THIS RESPECT) AND IN GETTING COMMITMENT, IN WRITING, FROM LATTER REGARDING TERMS OF CEASE-FIRE. MEDIATION IS TRADITIONAL LEBANESE ROLE, BUT SARKIS PLAYED IT VERY WELL.

5. MOST IMPORTANTLY, I SUSPECT WE ARE EVENTUALLY GOING TO FIND THE SOUTH LEBANON FIASCO HAS BEEN A TURNING POINT, LIKE THE GAZA RAIDS IN 1955 AND THE KARAMEH RAID IN THE LATE SIXTIES. AMONG OTHER THINGS, WHETHER THEY ADMIT IT OR NOT, IN ADDITION TO BLOTTING THEIR COPY BOOK, THE ISRAELIS HAVE BEEN IN INDIRECT COMMUNICATION WITH THE PLO, AND THEIR AGREEMENT ON CEASE-FIRE IS WITH THAT ORGANIZATION AND NOBODY ELSE. FACT THAT ISRAELI INCURSION WAS MISSTEP AND HAS PROVOKED STRONG REACTION FROM US WAS CLEAR TO PLO, WHICH TOOK ADVANTAGE OF SITUATION TO SHOW ITS OWN SUPPLENESS AND RESPONSIBILITY IN LETTING ISRAELIS OFF THE HOOK. THIS MAY
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BE ONLY TRANSITORY PHENOMENON, BUT IT IS IMPORTANT NEVERTHELESS BECAUSE IT SHOWS PLO NOT AFRAID TO MAKE A DEAL WITH ISRAEL IF CONDITIONS ARE RIGHT.

6. FINALLY, ALTHOUGH I AM NOT IN A POSITION TO EVALUATE THE PERFORMANCE OF THE RESPECTIVE MILITARY, IT SEEMS TO ME THE PALESTINIANS SHOWED GREAT SKILL AND COURAGE IN HOLDING ON TO KHAM UNDER VERY INTENSIVE BOMBARDMENT. THIS WILL HAVE A PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT LIKE KARAMEH. WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME THE ISRAELIS WITHDREW BEFORE THE BATTLE WAS WON?

7. DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS DAMASCUS AND TEL AVIV.
PARKER

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NNN

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